

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Wangechi Mutu. The title for this exhibition comes from the Gikuyu words for mud and trees, the *prima materia* for this body of work. Expanding her sculptural practice, this installation proposes an alternative to the systemic modes of representation in both Western and Eastern traditions by reimagining and recontextualizing the relations between the body, the natural world, and social forces. Well known for collages of hybrid forms drawn from folklore, popular culture, and art history, this new work marks an evolution in Mutu's critique of the construction of self-image. The complex texture and form that these figures offer prompt inquiry into the relationship between human existence and environment, producing interactions both intimate and challenging.

Mutu transforms the gallery space into a terrestrial cosmology that spans the microscopic to the mythic. Drawn from the dirt and brush in areas around her studio, she conjures a world replete with chimerical paradox. Faces of women, ornamental footwear, and patterned spheres evoking viruses emerge from natural materials that elaborate on the traditions of makonde carving. Embracing the raw physicality of her surroundings, she mobilizes the earth as a continuation of her own complex intersectional identity and artistic query. Adding gravity to these roughhewn totems, each invokes the psychic and social struggle for control over bodies through capitalism, the fetish, and disease. Seating of grey blankets grounds the installation, inviting audiences "to enter a place and re-think themselves."

This environment sets the stage for two new cast bronze sculptures that directly confront the myths of representation. A large-scale sculpture of an *nguva*, a water-woman of East African folklore, is at once familiar and otherworldly. Based on the transformation of the aquatic dugong, an herbivore closely related to the manatee, into the siren of superstition, Mutu staves off the disappearance of biological diversity and traditions of mythmaking by coalescing what she calls "the cross-pollination of ideas" into objects of desire. In another work, *Second Dreamer* (2016), she challenges the stasis of the bust and the appropriation of African masks through a self-portrait that captures the potential of psychic life. In this way, Mutu's sculpture acts as a corrective to a violent cultural consciousness, while offering an alternative narrative of embodiment and being in the world.

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Wangechi Mutu received her MFA from Yale University. Her work has been the subject of numerous solo shows, including, "Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey", which traveled to: Brooklyn Museum, New York; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami; and Block Museum, Evanston, Illinois. Other solo exhibitions include: SITE, Santa Fe; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Wiels Center for Contemporary Art,

Brussels; Art Gallery of Ontario; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Kunsthalle Wien; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Mutu is the recipient of Deutsche Bank's "Artist of the Year" award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Award, and the American Federation of Arts' Leadership Award. In the coming year, Mutu will present solo exhibitions at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium and The Contemporary Austin, Texas.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*